## Baton Rouge, LA – The Advocate

## 9 graduate from Jetson



LIZ CONDO/The Advocate

Valedictorian Stanley Wright is recognized for having the highest academic average of his class by Scenic Alternative High School Principal Ronnie B. Knox, right, at the Jetson Center for Youth. Wright and eight other young men were recognized Friday in a graduation ceremony.

## Holden shares sad life story

• By CHANTE DIONNE WARREN

• Advocate staff writer

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Five years ago, Stanley Wright, 20, entered Jetson Center for Youth a confused misfit with no future, he said.

On Friday, the valedictorian led a procession of eight other Scenic Alternative High School graduates into the Jetson auditorium before about 180 students, family, teachers, Jetson employees and other friends.

And he and the other graduates learned from the keynote speaker, Mayor-President Kip Holden, that having a difficult childhood is no obstacle to success.

Holden described his impoverished childhood as one of five children living in north Baton Rouge, where he shared a bedroom and one outdoor bathroom with his siblings.

Childhood asthma resulted in many school absences, he said. Domestic violence worsened between his parents, to point of his father pulling out a 12-gauge shotgun and shooting up their home, he said.

Nevertheless, Holden said, his parents worked hard.

"My parents had a great work ethic. My dad worked from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. at a plant and at 5 p.m. he went to work as a waiter. Mom worked for a dry cleaning business," he said.

After Holden began attending college, he said, his parents separated and divorced. He soon flunked out of college and started working two jobs a day.

He went back to college at LSU and earned a bachelor's degree in journalism, a master's degree in journalism at Southern University and he graduated from Southern's law school.

During his work as a news director for a local radio station, Holden read a newspaper article that listed his mother, her boyfriend and Holden's grandmother as subjects of an arrest for forging prescriptions and selling illegal drugs, he said.

Holden said his mother tried to turn her life around but got involved with another drug dealer and during a violent attack on his mother and her boyfriend, she was shot in the stomach.

Holden said his mother died years later from a heart attack at 51. His father died of complications from Alzheimer's disease.

"I've had every chance to have a pity party ... or stand on street corners," he said. "Life is not easy."

Wright, who grew up in south Baton Rouge, said he got involved with the wrong crowd and was convicted of armed robbery, landing him a five-year sentence.

He said he will be released in a few months.

He now wants to attend Louisiana Technical College and a four-year university to pursue social work.

"I want to start programs to talk to youth and tell them to stay around positive people that can inspire them," he said.

Holden had this advice for the teens: "When it seems like everybody's giving up or you're at the end of the road, keep pushing."